

PROFILE OF FORMER SPOUSES OF CIA OFFICERS EXCLUDED
FROM THE PROVISIONS OF THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE
AGENCY RETIREMENT AND DISABILITY SYSTEM
SPOUSES' EQUITY ACT OF 1982

Prepared by Members of the Association of American
Foreign Service Women Who Are Themselves
Former CIA Spouses

The purpose of this profile is to acquaint you briefly with a group of women who were excluded from coverage of the 1982 Act, because of Act's provisions were not automatically extended to a small group of older women divorced before 15 November 1982, the date when the Act became law. Although earned equally by all former spouses of CIA overseas employees who were married 10 or more years, the pension rights provided by the 1982 Act were denied we estimate to about 65 women nationally on the basis of their date of divorce. Thus, the women who were the reasons for the Act's enactment, who served as examples of service rendered and established need, were omitted from coverage. In discussions and correspondence, Congress took note of the inequities dealt to these loyal women and acknowledged its responsibility to address the issue of a just and fair compensation for them.

We have contacted 45 divorced and widowed CIA spouses through an informal network of communication that provides information on legislation, while providing peer support. We estimate that approximately 60 former spouses of CIA employees did not receive retirement and survivor annuity benefits under the 1982 Act.

Through our informal surveys, we have determined that these older former spouses typically had been married 24 years or more and some as long as 40 years before divorce occurred. They had spent 23 or more years as a CIA dependents and over half of these years they lived abroad. Two of these former spouses are already widowed; only two have remarried. (See summary statement attached.)

Almost all of these women, while contributing to their husband's career, spent substantial portions of their married years raising families overseas, frequently in developing countries. The living conditions in these areas subjected them to the hazards of rigorous climate, endemic disease, inadequate medical and hospital services, and even fear and physical danger during times of indigenous political upheavals. Reported illnesses from living abroad included hepatitis, meningitis, amoebic dysentery, and malaria.

Many of these women have health problems exacerbated by the inadequate medical care available abroad, including lasting amoebic damage, chronic gynecological problems, spinal deterioration from calcium deficiency through lack of milk products, and permanent liver damage. Several have children psychiatrically disturbed by their overseas experiences; three have children with physical disabilities.

Like the spouses of officers in other US overseas agencies, many of these women served when their participation in a wide variety of official and unofficial duties was traditionally--and in many instances, officially--required. Their husbands' efficiency reports included evaluations of the wives' cooperation and helpfulness. In 1972 a Joint State-AID-USIA Directive permitted spouses of Foreign Service officers to go abroad as private persons. They were no longer required to donate their time to mission-supporting duties. The tradition of service continued, however, even after the Directive.

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A worldwide survey by the Association of American Foreign Service Women has shown that American diplomatic wives have continued to fulfill--as in the past--a variety of unpaid assignments. Some wives reported voluntarily serving a total of 40 hours or more per week. Their volunteer tasks included developing English-as-a-second-language curriculum, lecturing on US customs, organizing and staffing charity benefits, translating for visiting officials, and serving as nurses and teachers in local health and welfare organizations and schools.

Our informal contacts with CIA spouses have shown that a CIA dependent wife faces additional responsibilities and stresses because of her spouse's employment in the US overseas clandestine service. One wife reported an additional 20 hours per week in CIA-related service over the 35 or more hours weekly demanded by her diplomatic role.

During their overseas years, many of the CIA dependent spouses faced the hardship of family separation and episodes of violence. They described shootings, bombings, floods. Some had had their homes attacked by gunfire or they and their children had been caught in mobs of anti-American demonstrators. Their children, some stated, had had serious accidents and illnesses without adequate medical care; some very small children--including premature newborns--had died.

In this country and abroad, a CIA wife--like the Foreign Service wife--has special impediments to economic independence resulting exclusively from the husband's employment. Cultural, legal, and linguistic barriers prevent her working overseas. When she can work, constant international mobility usually prevents her from vesting in any sort of retirement plan. When divorced, these women are left after long years of unpaid government abroad, with no employment record, no modern skills, and no Social Security.

Most former CIA spouses worked before their marriages and most, after being divorced in middle age, have resumed working. Unfortunately, their reentry into the workforce--after perhaps 20 to 25 years of absence--commonly has resulted in low-paying jobs with limited advancement potential. Women trained as teacher, geographer, journalist, translator and nurse are working as secretary, saleswoman, receptionist, and real estate agent. Some cannot work because of health problems, and some are still seeking employment. Only a few have reported that they can expect to be financially secure in their retirement years.

The entry of these women into the workforce, when most employees are contemplating retirement, has precluded the possibility of their providing independently for their retirement or subsistence during old age, when they are no longer physically able to work. This is especially critical because only a few of these former spouses reported that provisions were made at divorce for their old age.